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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, CONSTITUTION; BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: Discussions on the Constitution was one of the major editorial theme of the daily web-site editorials on August 23, 2005. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

[1A. "Citizenship and Sectarianism; The Difference Between The Sunni and Shiite Constitution"](#)
(Iraqi Press Website in Arabic - Editorial by Ali Al-Shlah, http://www.iraqipapers.com/dustoor_6_6_5_ali.htm)

"Iraq is ruled by one sect which nobody used to talk about. Now sectarianism is a familiar topic of conversation, since the government is comprised of Iraqi people from all spectrums! . . . Which group committee members identify with or not, as well as their qualifications, have become main concerns for Iraqis because it is a hot Iraqi and international Arab issue. This point was taken to such extremes that when Secretary of State Rice visited Iraq and demanded that the Prime Minister guarantee a larger role for Sunnis in drafting the constitution, nobody claimed that this was ethnic power sharing. But it seems that this topic only comes up when the government is faced with the necessity of giving non-Sunnis their rights (or not) in the political process . . . Iraqis had problems with Saddam's regime not because he was Sunni but because he was a criminal. People would have turned against him even if he had been Shi'ite. Why do people say that every anti-terrorist operation is against Sunnis? . . I wish that I had heard the protesters on the Constitutional Drafting Committee say that they opposed the committee because it excluded an Iraqi legal advisor. But, to oppose it because they concluded it didn't have enough Sunnis isn't a good enough reason. The committee is considered sectarian because the leaders of the Sunnis convinced their group to boycott the elections. Then those very same leaders demanded a big portion of the cake through terrorizing others with the threat of a boycott, though Sunnis did not elect the Sunni spokespersons. They are not legitimate. The government responded to their blackmail with support from abroad to the extent that I'm afraid that Sunni extremists will boycott the upcoming elections to get more than they could get in a free and fair election. In that manner they will continue to assume more power and get away with their grandstanding. The written constitution won't differentiate between one Iraqi and another and it won't favor one sect over another. Political leaders should all concentrate on writing a patriotic constitution and not sectarianism one."

[1B. "Iraqi Constitution and the Dialogue of the Deaf"](#)
(Iraq 4 All News in Arabic - Editorial By Jihad Al-Khazin)

"It might be true that the constitutional committee had completed 90% of the draft before its August 15th deadline, but its also true that the remaining 10% is the largest source of disagreement among the three main groups . . . In fact, the deliberations have shed light on how deep the differences are among Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. These differences led the negotiators to give themselves another week for deliberations despite pressure from the United States. They went into the extension with no practical program for reaching a solution for problems that preventing

their agreement in the first place . . . The Shiites demand a federal region in the south that would enable them to benefit from its oil resources. The Kurds in the north also want their own federal region but they oppose the idea of Islam as the main source of legislation . . . The 15 Sunni Constitutional Committee members have threatened to withdraw from the process if Shiites and Kurds continue to insist on these concessions . . . The United States has pressured all parties to give up their points and reach an agreement. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, expressed disappointment over the postponement after acting as the 72nd member of the committee. Maybe he was even the first . . . Federalism is the first step in the plan to divide Iraq. The Shiites and Kurds are already talking about the next step, which is autonomy . . . It is a real possibility that the failure of this process could lead to a civil war. That kind of war could already be on the way, even though no one is talking about it yet. We are suffering from insane terrorism that could not be described as a resistance movement. It is claiming many lives on daily basis. While the United States, which put Iraq in these circumstances, is trying to emphasize the positive side of the situation that just doesn't exist."

C. "Concession Over Self-Determination"
(Al-Rafidayn Web Site (independent) in Arabic - Editorial by Venus Fa'iq
<http://www.alrafidayn.com>)

"News of Kurdish concessions over the right of self-determination didn't have any shocking impact on my soul . . . Since I did speculate that Kurds would end up with nothing . . . I would have liked to ask Kurdish officials the question: When did Kurds have any rights to give up in the first place, and could they give them up without going back to their people? . . I don't know what rights Kurds will have after this concession and after agreeing that Islam should be the main source of legislation--these two points alone are enough to suppress the Kurdish people in a civilized manner right under the world's sight . . . We should point out that the American position changed during the night. Americans, whom Kurds thought were keen on Kurdish rights and were their strongest ally ever, have turned their back on Kurds in favor of Shiites, the neighbors of Iran. . . . I can't think how any attention could be given towards Kurdish demands anymore, even in Kirkuk, especially after Al-Sistani's fatwa. I believe Kirkuk will be the next step in the series of concessions and I hope I'm wrong."

D. "Iraq, Uniqueness of the Constitutional Battle . . . The Uniqueness of the Iraqi Case"
(Soat Al-Iraq (The Voice of Iraq) in Arabic - Editorial by Ameer Al-Taheri
<http://www.sotaliraq.com>)

"Does the national assembly's decision to postpone the discussion of the draft constitution represent a major setback for Iraq that has just been freed from a dictatorship or is it merely a minor event on the road to democracy? . . . Failure to meet the constitutional deadline would be considered a drawback for only one reason, it's the first time the Iraqi leadership has failed to fulfill a political obligation on time since the toppling of the previous regime . . . Despite the prospect of postponement being seen as a tactical drawback for Iraqis, it represents a democratic development in an Iraq that was recently freed from decades of dictatorship. Constitutional committee members stood up to pressures from different factions including Al-Sistani and the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq . . . The vast majority of Iraqis are content with the manner through which decisions are made, and they're aware that the era where constitutions were imposed by tyrants is gone forever, and that no single group can dictate its will over others, and most importantly they know it's no longer possible to ignore the will of the people . . . The discussions around the drafting of the constitution have included Iraqis participating in over 300 conferences enabling 50,000 to express their opinions; in addition to the participation of many unions, women's groups, and human rights organizations."

Khalilzad